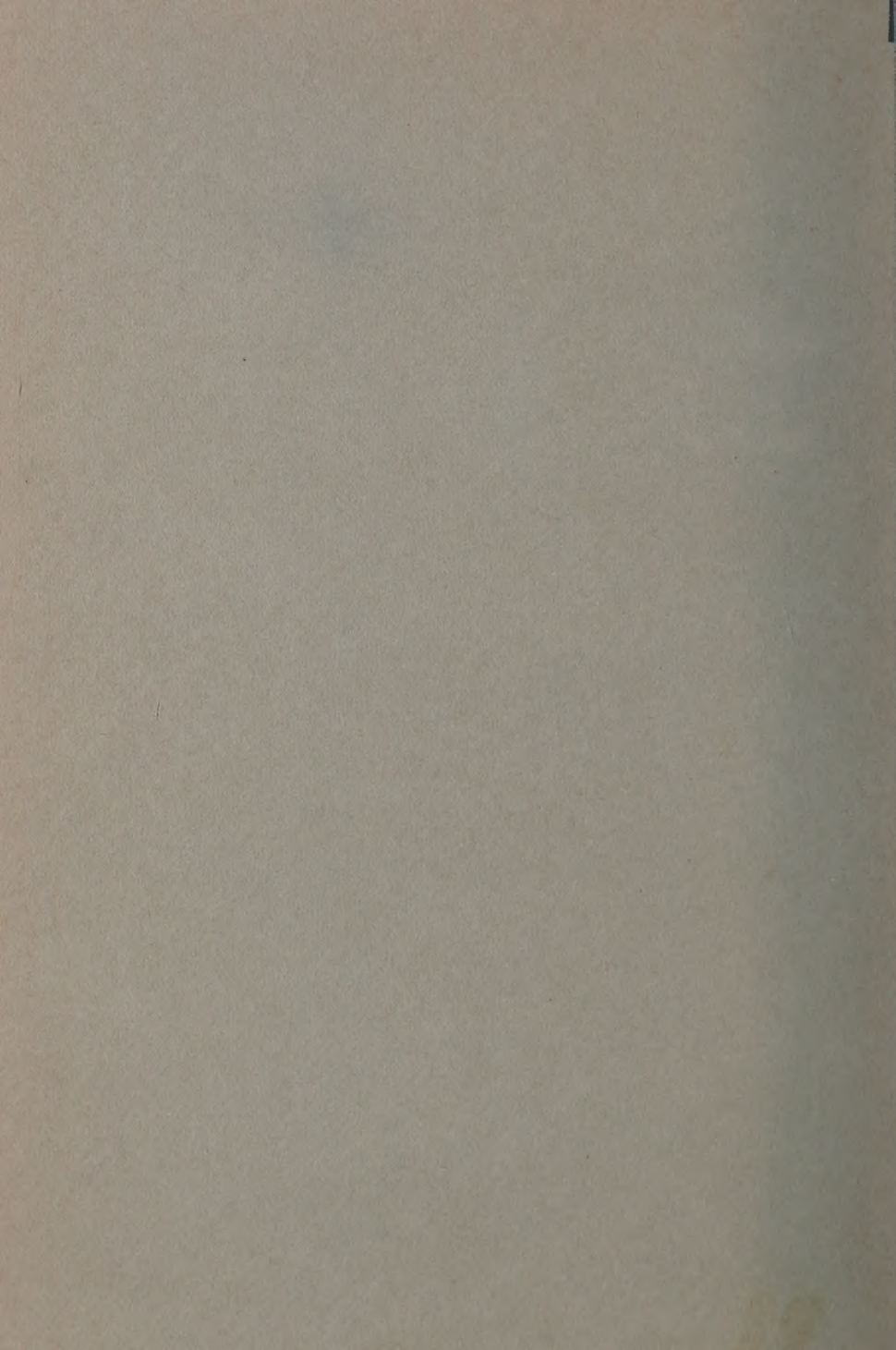


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The Character and the
Claims of the Church Book

By
Luther D. Reed



The Character and the Claims of the Church Book

BY THE
REV. LUTHER D. REED

Address delivered at the Second Anniversary of the Lutheran
Church Book and Literature Society, Philadelphia, Pa.,
April 14, 1907.

John C. Mathis

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The Character and the Claims of the Church Book

II Timothy 1: 13. "Hold fast the form of sound words."

The Apostle in the days before his certain martyrdom at the hands of a cruel Nero, thinks much of the future of the Church of Christ. His final letters to his "son in the faith" contain most earnest admonitions to him to guard the purity of the faith and to preach it incessantly. He had found a "form of words," it may be, helpful and indispensable in committing the teaching of the Lord to Timothy, and in his concern for the preservation of the truth and its transmission to others, he here commands that even this form be carefully treasured.

Thus knowledge has ever been preserved. Human experience has crystallized into maxims and proverbs; science has its theorems and formulas; organized society its laws and statutes; religion its creeds and confessions. By these does one generation learn its great lessons, and by these does it teach the coming age.

We would invite your attention to a consideration of our manual of devotion, the Church Book, as such a "form of sound words" and ask you to observe first of all,—

Its Character.

It is of *Churchly origin*. Large portions of it are purely Biblical, and it is well for us to realize how thoroughly scriptural in content and feeling it is. The text of the Liturgy is largely composed of Biblical extracts. In addition to the great use made of the Psalms, Numbers, I Kings, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezra, Ruth, Jeremiah, Zechariah and Malachi are represented from the Old Testament, and the Four Gospels, Acts, Romans, I and II Corinthians,

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, II Timothy, Hebrews, I Peter, I John and Revelation from the New Testament. Many other portions, like the Te Deum and the Collects, are scriptural in tone and feeling, though not literal extracts; while the development of the Creeds and Confessions, the Ministerial Acts and the Hymns of the Church, has been in every case suggested and determined by Scripture.

But while the germs are purely Biblical, their development and present form are the result of the Church's effort to meet its own requirements. Together they form the "Book of Needs," as the Eastern Church to-day calls one of its liturgical collections.

Such needs were felt very early. As soon as the infant Church emerged from persecution, and Christian teaching and faith began to express itself in the experience of congregations and peoples, it became necessary to have some "form of sound words" for the ordering of public worship, the administration of the Sacraments, the solemnization of marriage, the burial of the dead, and many other needs of Christian life. In order to refute error and defend and preserve truth, creeds and confessions of faith came into being. The Christian apprehension of life soon found a voice in Hymns and songs of devotion. It created the Christian home; it established catechization and Christian education and founded Theological Schools for the ministry and developed principles and forms for Church government.

Such needs have ever been before the Church, and no succeeding age and no portion of the Church have ever been able to dispense with such "forms" for any length of time. There have been and there still are those who deprecate the use of fixed forms in worship, who professedly ignore the results of the universal experience of Christianity and substitute for them the extemporaneous expressions of individuals; while missionary efforts and sectarian and unschooled

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branches of the Church have also occasionally attempted great originality of method. But such attempts have never been general or long-lived. Compared with the liturgical Churches of the world to-day and of history, these movements are relatively insignificant in numbers and influence, being mostly confined to our own country and a portion of Great Britain and to the last few centuries of Christian History. And even here the experience is that with growing knowledge and culture comes the realization of the superiority of the "form of sound words" which has back of it the weight and strength of historical authority and universal usage.

The character of our Book is further seen in its *Catholic content*. By the "Church Book" we must not think of a book prepared to serve the needs of a particular congregation; a book to be used in the Church rather than in the home. We must understand it to reflect and to provide for the needs of the Church Universal. It is the Church Book of the great everlasting Church of Christ. How it widens our horizon and clarifies our vision to realize that in it we have something of the Christian faith and experience of every age and of every continent! In the Liturgy we see traces of the Jewish worship in the posture of standing in prayer, and in the distinction between the sacramental and sacrificial in the Service, the priest facing the sanctuary as he prayed and turning to the people to bless them. We see portions of the old Temple Service in the Hebrew words, Amen, Hallelujah and Hosanna, and in the constant use of the Psalms and the Aaronic Benediction. We see the Gentile Christian influence in the choice of Sunday as the day for worship and in the gradual development of the Christian Year. We trace the reading of Scripture, the use of Psalms and spiritual songs, the Sermon, the administration of the Sacraments, the Lord's Prayer, Kyrie, Verba, Agnus Dei, Nunc Dimittis, and the Apostolic Benediction

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to their origin in the New Testament itself. We see how the Ancient Church, and largely the Greek or Eastern portion of it, developed the Invitatory, Preface, Salutation, Sanctus, Gloria in Excelsis, the General Prayer, and the posture of standing during the reading of the Gospel. We observe the especial contribution of the early Roman or Western Church in the Confiteor (which we have greatly modified), the Introit, the Collects, the Pericopees and their Responses and the Proper Prefaces.

We see the influence of the Reformation not only in the purification of the text, but in the entire spirit of the Service; the active participation of the congregation instead of the vicarious performance of the priest, and the use of the vernacular throughout instead of the Latin. We see Luther's especial influence in the establishment of the very principles of public worship which determine our Services to-day, in the marvelous development of the Church Hymn, the restoration of the Sermon, and the present form of the beautiful Collect for Thanksgiving after the Communion. We remember that we owe the formula for Distribution and the rubric for additional consecration of elements to our German Lutheran Churches of the sixteenth century, and that we are indebted to the Reformed Churches of that period for the substitution of the Apostles' Creed for the Nicene Creed, and for the reading of the entire Service in the colloquial tone instead of the choral inflections which our Lutheran Reformers were so careful to retain. We see the contribution of modern German Mecklenburg in our Lectionary. We know how the Church of England has given us the translation of the historical Collects in elegant English as well as contributing some original Collects of her own. And we know that we owe to our own American Lutheran Church the liturgical scholarship and editorial ability which have worked and shaped the whole.

And to continue this rapid sketch of the Catholic charac-

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ter of the contents of our Church Book beyond the Liturgy itself, let us remember how the ancient Creeds indicate the fight of the Early Church against heresy in that age, while the Augsburg Confession was, and is, the especial protest and declaration of our own Church, and of all Protestantism indeed, against the abuses and errors of Roman Catholicism. Recall the part which the Small Catechism has played, and is playing, in history as a "form of sound words" to bind millions to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. See how the needs of the Christian home, the local congregations, and the great Church bodies, as well as the private devotions of the individual, are supplied in the orders for Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Marriage, Visitation of the Sick, Burial, Ordination, Installation, Consecration and Synodical requirements. Then think for a moment of the Hymns of all ages drawn from the Greek of Clement of Alexandria and Anatolius; the Latin of Ambrose and Bernard of Clairvaux; the Italian of Savonarola; the German of Luther, Gerhardt and the Moravian Zinzendorf; the English of Wordsworth, John Mason Neale and the dissenters Watts and Wesley, and of the Americans Muhlenberg, Coxe and Doane. Only as we appreciate these facts can we realize how comprehensive and truly Catholic in content our Church Book is.

It has, however, a no less strongly marked *Confessional character*. It is denominational, but not provincial. The Augsburg Confession and the Catechism at once stamp it as Lutheran, but the Liturgy, Ministerial Acts and Hymns no less clearly reflect the Confessional standpoint. Extreme care has been taken to have every page of this book a "form of sound words" which would harmonize with the Lutheran conception of Christian truth. This involved many omissions in the historic Services, many slight alterations, and often new stanzas, in the Hymns. The American Lutheran of the twentieth century is not identically the same in his

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conceptions and in his outlook upon life as a Continental Lutheran of the sixteenth century or even of the present. Hence our Liturgy is not a translation of any other Liturgy. It is not the Apostolic Liturgy; it is not the Medieval Liturgy, nor the Liturgy of our Reformers, nor exactly that of our modern Lutherans in Germany or Scandinavia to-day. Much less is it the Liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer or of any other body of Christendom. Our Service Book must be what our Church Book is, a distinctively modern, American, Lutheran product. Its *authorship is composite* and the Committees charged with its preparation have worked under the rule "the consensus of pure Lutheran Liturgies." This, and not the individual preference of any one man or any one body of men, established the great outlines of our worship. Taste had its place and it has given us the Offertory after the Sermon, and the Nunc Dimittis in the Communion Office, where the rule would not have provided them. Individual scholarship and literary ability of the highest character have had their play in the shaping of material and in the finish of the whole. But the Church Book is not the book of an individual, or of a single committee, or of a congregation or a Synod. It is the consensus of the best in the history of the Christian worship, a consensus at once scriptural, churchly, catholic and confessional, and, at the same time, adapted to the requirements and the abilities of American Lutheran churchmen of this day and generation.

If such is the character of this "form of sound words," what are its claims upon us?

Its Claims.

Our Church Book may certainly claim of all its users the first right of *intelligent appreciation*. As Lutherans we rightly wish to know something of the distinctive doctrines

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of our Church, something of its historical development, something of its great leaders and of the part which it has played in history. Why should we not wish to know as much about the great models of worship which our fathers builded?

If we lived in some cathedral town of the Old World to-day and worshipped weekly in the noble structure, we would know every nook and corner of it, every shaft and pillar, every bit of wondrous carving on capital and screen, the dimensions of choir and transept, and the date of every bay. We would know who laid the crypt and who carved the stalls and who completed the spire. We could show where the Puritans stabled their horses near the altar, broke out precious stained glass windows and mutilated carvings with blows of their heavy swords. We would know when and by whom each part was restored. It would make history vital and history would quicken it.

Our Church Book is much like a cathedral. History is written in it. It bears the marks of age and the scars of battle. Its Creeds and Gloria Patris and Confessions ring out as battle-cries against falsehood and error; its Te Deums and Magnificats praise the Almighty throughout the centuries; its Collects and Litanies and spiritual songs have brought human souls close to God for ages; its Word and Sacraments have nourished and still keep alive all faith on the earth. A Master Architect has builded it and its restoration in this latter day has been made with reverence and intelligence.

In the Providence of God the Lutheran Church has given many great and good things to the world. She laid down the cardinal foundations for all Protestantism in her doctrines of justification by faith, and the supremacy of the Word. She made it possible for all men actively and intelligently to worship the Lord by establishing the universal priesthood to believers. She gave Christian feeling a voice

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in the Church Hymn and she first of all purified and remodelled the historic Liturgy. Her eminent service in this regard is not yet fully appreciated even by scholars. Yet the words of Dr. B. M. Schmucker in the Preface to the Church Book are as true as any ever penned. He says: "Beyond question, the Lutheran Service deserves to be placed alongside of the Confession of Augsburg; the one being the central Service, as the other is the central Confession, of Protestant Christendom."

The only other Service which is worthy of any comparison with our own is that of the Book of Common Prayer. And history teaches us that the Lutheran Order of Service was completely established in Germany before 1540, its principles being defined by Luther as early as 1523. The first attempt at a reformed Order of Service in England was the First Prayer Book of Edward VI, which appeared in 1549. This is confessedly largely influenced by the Lutheran Orders on the Continent and was in many respects a better Order, historically and liturgically, than the revised Second Book of 1552 and all the later editions until the present.

We must ever acknowledge our indebtedness as Americans and English-speaking Lutherans to the Book of Common Prayer for the influence of its choice language and its truly liturgical and devotional spirit, as well as for the English translation of the Collects. It has also helped to inspire us to study our own liturgical models and to transform them into suitable mediums for devotion in our own language. But even here we must remember that the greatest impulse to American Lutheran liturgical study came from a revival of interest in these subjects in Germany, and from the labors of our fellow Lutherans there—scholars like Kliefoth, Hoefling, Loehe, Schoeberlein and many others—labors which had their fruition in the revised Church Orders and Cantionals published before the High Church movement in England was fairly launched

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The Book of Common Prayer has the prestige which centuries of use by millions of English-speaking people have naturally established. It has undergone no important change since 1662. Until the appearance of the "Common Service" there was no Liturgy in the English language worthy of comparison with it. The opportunity to prepare the Common Service brought with it the opportunity to make an entirely fresh study of the Liturgy and liturgical acts. This has enabled us to realize how truly conservative our Lutheran Reformers were and how greatly the Anglican Liturgy has suffered at the hands of radicals. The German Lutheran liturgies of the sixteenth century preserved the clear outlines of the historic Service. The first Prayer Book of Edward VI (1549), largely influenced by these, retained the Introits (though in the form of entire Psalms), the Agnus Dei and the Gloria in Excelsis in its historic position in the Communion Service. Later revisions under Puritan and Calvinistic influences forever lost to the Book of Common Prayer the entire series of Introits and the Agnus Dei, and transposed the Gloria in Excelsis to an unhistorical place after the Communion. In addition, these influences introduced the unliturgical interruption of the Decalogue in the Communion Office. The historic Invitations, Antiphons, Responsories, Sequences and Graduals have also been omitted from the English Liturgy. In all these points our Common Service may justly claim an unquestioned superiority over the Book of Common Prayer, with its many marks of provincialism.

We may just as truly rejoice in the comparison which our Church Book sustains with the Service Books of Continental Lutherans in Germany and Scandinavia to-day. The very best of these, the Orders in use in Bavaria, Saxony, Mecklenburg, and in Sweden and Norway, also have strongly marked provincialisms, and in catholicity of spirit, and in practical use by the congregation as a whole, our Church

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Book is eminently superior to all of them. This has been frankly and generously acknowledged by the most distinguished German liturgical scholars in their appreciative and enthusiastic reviews of our Common Service in its German form in our own "Kirchenbuch." These are facts which as American Lutherans we should know and appreciate. They are claims which our Church Book makes upon our intelligence and loyalty.

The next claim of our Book upon us is that of *intelligent use*. We have, as a Church, hardly begun to appreciate the possibilities of education and development in sound churchmanship which lie enfolded in it.

As our pastors come to see the Church Book more clearly in its historical perspective and to realize its broad, catholic and objective spirit, they will use it more intelligently. We will be spared the pain, now not uncommon, of hearing the Liturgy read with the dramatic effort and personal fervor which conveys the impression, if that were possible, that the Service is the immediate product of the minister's personal inspiration and fresh from his pen.

As our educators appreciate its pedagogical possibilities there will be lessons in the Sunday-school and in the Catechetical Class devoted to the Church Book and to its proper understanding and use. Our Luther Leagues will study it, and our pastors and teachers will lecture upon it. We will come to know the principles of worship which underlie it, and these principles will rule our Church Architecture, our Church Music, and every other form of our Church Art. They, and they alone, will protect us from the vagaries, the crude taste and the extreme individualism of ministers, organists and influential laymen. The new generation, nourished upon the principles and practices of the Church Book, will develop a true and proper churchliness. Strengthened by this "conscious fellowship with all members of the Body of Christ in the present, in the past

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and in the world to come " (which is the best definition of "churchliness" I have ever seen), this generation will bravely meet the problems of the future.

The possibilities for use of the Church Book in the home must not be overlooked. Its Tables and Lessons will guide us in our daily readings of Scripture. Its Collects and Prayers will stimulate our devotion and broaden our Christian sympathies. Its Catechism sounds forth the harmony of the consistent Christian's outlook upon life now and hereafter. The text, and even the rubrics, of the several orders for Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Visitation of the Sick and Burial of the Dead meet the needs of every Christian household.

Another claim upon us is the duty of *distribution*. The duty of spreading the Scriptures broadcast is fully recognized. Bible Societies receive generous support everywhere. As Lutheran Churchmen we must appreciate the sphere of organizations like the Church Book and Literature Society. Our missions and needy congregations, especially those upon the frontiers of our denominational development, must be supplied. It is spiritual meat and drink for their strengthening and encouragement.

Our devout forefathers brought with them from the Fatherland their Bibles and Hymn-books. Surrounded by wilderness and harassed by hostile natives, they prized these treasures, which have come down to our own day as precious heirlooms in many households. So our Church Book means more to many a lonely family in the far West or North or South, to the scattered Lutherans of the mission fields, or to the "shut-ins," the aged and the ill in Homes and Hospitals, than to most of us who see it rarely but in the pew. Let us "hold fast" this "form of sound words" by giving it to Missions, to Homes, Hospitals, Prisons and other Institutions, as well as by placing copies in hotels and other public places.

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The final claim of the Church Book pledges us to the *development* of this manual as the future requirements of the Church may suggest. The Church Book has more than a past; it has a future.

As an English-speaking Church we are very recent and weak. But forces far beyond our control are fast altering this fact. Silently, while we sleep, a great transformation proceeds. But another generation or two and our vast hosts in this country, already the third largest Protestant Body in the United States, will think and speak and sing and pray in English. For this they must have "forms of sound words" in English, and for this they are already turning to the Common Service and the other portions of the Church Book. The Joint Synod of Ohio is now discussing the adoption of practically our form for Vespers. The Iowa Synod by special arrangement uses the Church Book entirely for all its English congregations. The Missouri Synod, the largest General Body of Lutherans in America, has also officially adopted our Liturgy for its English work. The United Norwegian Church is now making overtures looking to this same action. Thus we see all the great Bodies, numbering 1,700,000 of the 1,940,000 Lutherans reported in this country, officially endorsing, and committed to a part or to all of the material in our Church Book for the use of the English congregations.

The advantages of uniformity are so obvious that the tendency unquestionably will be toward the elimination of the differences in the forms which personal taste and individual influence have developed. When once this is attained we will find a wealth of literature, historical, explanatory, devotional, growing up about our Liturgy and our Hymnal which will inform our people and elevate and strengthen their ideals. Hundreds of such works have been called forth by the Book of Common Prayer, which has, in its character as a Service in the English language, a history of

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more than three hundred and fifty years back of it. The Church Book has barely passed its fortieth anniversary, and in its extended form of the Common Service it is indeed scarcely twenty years old. The most farsighted of us cannot see what its use and influence will be among the hosts of English-speaking Lutherans who will yet arise in this country and come to claim its "form of sound words" as their very own.

So we owe a duty to care for and to properly direct this future. There is nothing canonical about these forms. Neither in substance nor in order are they irrevocably fixed in every detail. The experience and expression of centuries have established and approved a certain framework, and have bequeathed us certain classics of form which in all probability will never be surpassed or suppressed. But our distinctive Church life in this land and this age will find its own expression. It will and must test the old forms; it will and must adapt them to its own particular needs; it will and must make its own contributions to the great Church Book of the ages. Our rubrics and details of practice are in the formative period. The end is not yet. As in every other science and art, true development and advancement will be upon the foundations of a comprehensive and sympathetic knowledge of the past. We must cultivate such knowledge; we must develop true and adequate liturgical scholarship, deep and broad enough in its attainments to rightly mould the liturgical life and expression of our Church in this land in the future, with all its complex interests in Liturgiology, Architecture, Hymnology, Church Music, Church Embroidery, and every other Church Art. Such developments are not weeds that flourish without care; they are exquisite blooms and require cultivation.

Our deepening appreciation of the Church Book and of its forms is an indication of our growing intelligence and culture as a Church, and for this we must be thankful. As

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our horizon further widens and our knowledge and our sympathies increase, we will come more and more to love and cherish these classics of worship, for the noble history they enshrine, for the uplifting, spiritual power they still possess, and for the promise and hope they contain of confessing children of God in centuries yet to come.

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